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RSB-115, December 15, 1964

To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *Thomas L. Hughes*
Subject: Soviet German Policy in Flux

Clearly, some Soviet positions on German issues which in the past had been rigidly held are now in flux. The touchstone of Soviet policy on Berlin — the free city — seems to be rapidly disappearing from Soviet public statements, and references to the much-touted German peace treaty are becoming very sparse. Instead, Moscow is talking more and more of a somewhat vague German peace settlement in the broader context of European security. Since Gromyko has not elucidated these changes in his talks with you in New York, we thought that you might find useful a review of shifting Soviet positions on these topics.

ABSTRACT

The new leadership has accelerated the trend which had already been evident under Khrushchev toward greater emphasis upon the broad issue of European security and less upon the narrow issue of Berlin itself. Not only has the issue of Berlin been played down, but the most recent authoritative reference to it is cast in terms which suggest the possibility of a substantial scaling down of Soviet desiderata for a Berlin settlement.

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Given the new emphasis upon European security and the decline of active Soviet pressure against Berlin, the Soviets may now be more amenable to a proposal on a four-power forum (on European security rather than purely on intra-German matters) than they were in 1962. Moscow's interest in such a forum would lie in part in an expectation that the USSR can inject itself more successfully into intra-NATO affairs because of the political cross-currents now evident within the Western alliance. The Soviets would, moreover, hope to stimulate the isolation of West Germany from its allies by engaging the latter in political-military negotiations about central Europe. Although Moscow seems to have applied the brakes to Khrushchev's intended flirtations with Bonn, it probably still hopes over the longer run to enter into separate dealings with a Federal Republic frustrated by the nonfulfillment of its aspirations with respect to reunification.

The language used in the Soviet-Czech communique of December 4 suggests that Moscow is developing a new formulation of its basic policy goals with respect to Berlin. In calling for Western acceptance of West Berlin as an independent political entity instead of for a free city, the Soviets evidently wish to give an appearance of scaling down their demands for a Berlin settlement. The immediate tactical purpose of the new formula seems to be to hold out the appearance of something promising to the allies, and thus contribute to Western frictions over federal presence in West Berlin. However, even if the new formula meant that the Soviets were dropping

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their demands for withdrawal of Western forces, the resulting Soviet position would still be designed to serve the old objective of isolating West Berlin and using the Berlin issue as a device for dividing West Germany from its allies.

Frankly, we hesitate to draw too firm conclusions from Soviet positions as they are currently being expressed. Such tactical considerations as Moscow's desire to play off the Western allies at a moment when they see NATO in a period of reappraisal are obvious, and there may well be no more to it than that. Nevertheless, it remains at least possible that even if none are in evidence yet, the USSR may develop some new specific proposals on the basis of the vague new formulations now emerging.

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The Trend Under Khrushchev

When Khrushchev heated up the Berlin crisis in 1961, he resisted Western efforts to broaden the agenda for possible negotiations because he did not want to dissipate pressure on Berlin itself. As his ability to mount pressure on the Berlin issue declined, Khrushchev gradually sought to broaden discussion to include European security issues, and in conjunction with the test-ban agreement revived several standing Soviet proposals for European regional disarmament.

Brezhnev's Statements About European Security

Brezhnev has accelerated the trend begun by Khrushchev. He has gone further than Khrushchev in shifting emphasis toward European security. In three speeches since he took over as Party chief (October 19, November 6, and December 3) Brezhnev has alluded to European security as a major goal of Soviet policy. On two occasions he has included a German peace settlement as part of European security. Brezhnev has not mentioned either the German peace treaty or West Berlin.

Though routine propaganda has mentioned the peace treaty and West Berlin in traditional terms (which were also used in the October revolution slogans),

the elite of Soviet publicists have been following Brezhnev's usage. Gromyko on December 7 at the UN spoke of European security and a German peace settlement, (but not of a treaty). The same usage also appeared in the TASS statement on MLF on November 14, and in the authoritative Polyanov Izvestiya article of November 27.

What, then, does this shift in emphasis toward European security mean?

The MLF as the First Target

In the first instance, it seems to mean the new regime's rededication to propagandistic attacks upon the MLF. On December 3 Brezhnev followed up the November 14 TASS statement (which had for the first time developed explicitly and authoritatively the argument that the MLF would violate the Potsdam agreement) with a highly propagandistic attack on the MLF as a

threat to European security. Gromyko on December 7 reiterated Soviet opposition to MLF, warning that it would create a new obstacle to German reunification -- though he stopped just short of saying that it would make reunification impossible.

Polyanov Hints at Negotiations

However vituperative Soviet attacks upon the MLF may be, they do not appear to exhaust the subject of Soviet interest in European security. In his November 27 article elaborating on Brezhnev's allusions to European security, Izvestiya's expert on German affairs, Nikolai Polyanov, hinted at Soviet interest in negotiations on European security. He did not say so explicitly, but he seemed to envision four-power talks (US, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union).

In his conversation with Secretary Rusk on December 2, Gromyko like Polyanov deplored the MLF; but even more directly than Polyanov, he indicated that the Soviets were prepared to discuss the MLF separately from other subjects. He thus avoided making abandonment of the MLF a precondition for negotiations (except on the specific subject of nontransfer of nuclear weapons) in either the December 2 conversation or in the one on December 5, when he returned to the subject of the MLF.

Nevertheless, the apparent Soviet calculation that this is a propitious moment for negotiations seems to be based in part upon frictions in the West over the MLF. Successful negotiations, Polyanov argued, would be based upon Western acceptance of the status quo in Eastern Europe, including two Germanies (and West Berlin as a separate political entity) and upon Western willingness to override West German objections. He seemed to reckon upon the election of a Labor government in England and French objections to the MLF as contributing to that end. If last year Moscow saw the Franco-German treaty contributing to the solidarity of those in the West most likely to resist changes in German policy, Polyanov now seems to be toying with the notion that Franco-German frictions may contribute to a situation in which four-power negotiations might be a means of isolating West Germany from its allies. Viewed in this context Gromyko's plea of December 7 for better relations with Bonn (despite the collapse of Khrushchev's proposed visit) seemed to be based in turn upon the prospect of West German frustrations with its allies.

A Four-Power Forum?

In 1962 the Soviets rejected a proposal to establish a four-power forum of deputy foreign ministers. Since then conditions have changed. Moscow has suspended systematic pressure on Berlin, the Soviets are giving greater emphasis to European security, and in reaffirming the validity of the Potsdam agreements the Soviets acknowledged four-power responsibility for Germany. Today there appears to be no overriding reason for the Soviets to reject such a proposal, as they did in 1962, and Moscow would weigh the advantages and disadvantages of a specific proposal.

A forum devoted to reunification would not be acceptable; it would undercut Moscow's position that reunification is a matter for the Germans themselves. Soviet interest in a four-power forum would lie in the European security field. In the first instance, Moscow might hope that creation of a four-power forum from which the FRG would by definition be excluded might tend to isolate West Germany from its allies. In agreeing to a four-power forum, Moscow would presumably see it as contributing to the basic Soviet policy goal of securing Western acceptance of the status quo in Eastern Europe including the division of Germany. Moreover, to the degree that Moscow sees the Western alliance as being in a state of flux, the Soviets would presumably hope to use negotiations on European security as an area for maneuver in attempting to exacerbate Western frictions as well as to attempt to influence the outcome of negotiations within NATO.

No New Soviet Proposals

If a four-power forum on European security were established, it does not follow that it would make any rapid progress toward agreements. For while Gromyko did -- in keeping with the new stress on the subject of European security -- in his UN speech allude to the goal of a comprehensive European security system which would replace the present military alliances, his grand vision of a new order in Europe was not borne out by any new proposals.¹ The absence of any new proposals at a juncture when Gromyko

1. His speech and the memorandum on partial measures which he tabled only catalogued old staples. He proposed as first order of business a NATO-Warsaw Pact nonaggression treaty. He mentioned partial withdrawals of foreign troops, and alluded vaguely (whether the antecedent was troop or budget cuts was not clear) to something already having been done in that regard. He also alluded to nuclear-free zones and the Gomulka proposal for a freeze on existing nuclear deployments. His memorandum repeated the

was attempting to emphasize European security seems to reflect the inhibitions imposed upon Soviet policymaking in the European security field by the continuation of evident intra-bloc differences and by domestic political considerations.

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proposal for measures to prevent surprise attack; once again linking observation posts to troop cuts and denuclearization.

Gromyko did not call for a cut in West German forces. That had been raised publicly in the March 7, 1964 TASS statement on West German policy and was implicit at least in the reiteration of the validity of the Potsdam agreement in the June 12 Soviet/East German treaty which had implied Soviet willingness to exercise restraint on Berlin if the allies would keep a rein on the West German military establishment.

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A New Formula on Berlin

Despite the inhibitions on the decision-making process in Moscow, the Soviets appear to be discarding at least the verbiage of their proposal to make of West Berlin a free city. The term free city has not been used by an authoritative Soviet source since October 18, 1964, and so far as we can tell from incomplete reports it was not mentioned at the East German Party plenum which ended on December 5.

On December 4 the Soviet-Czech communique marking the end of Novotny's visit to the Soviet Union contained a new formulation on Berlin. Coming as it did after the standing formula had fallen into relative disuse, the new language appeared to be a deliberate effort at propagating a new formulation of basic policy goals.

The communique referred to the desirability of:

"a peace treaty with the two German states and also an agreement on the status of West Berlin as an independent political unit." (Emphasis supplied)

The new language seems to have two implications. First, to undo the heretofore customary linkage between the German peace treaty and a Berlin settlement which had generally been expressed in terms of a Berlin solution's being "on the basis of" the peace treaty. Second, to describe the objective of Soviet policy towards Berlin in new terms. Heretofore, the basic Soviet goal has been cast in terms of a "free city" of West Berlin which -- and the use of these adjectives has varied from time to time -- would be "neutral" and "demilitarized", or else in terms of "normalization" of the situation in West Berlin which covered the free city idea. Instead, the new formula calls for agreement on the status of West Berlin as an independent political entity. The term seems to be derived from the June 12 treaty (in which the Soviets and East Germans agreed to regard West Berlin as an independent political entity), which in turn seemed to express the notion Ulbricht had in mind in the summer of 1963 when he first dubbed the existing status of West Berlin as a "special territory," i.e., something akin to but short of a free city.

In effect, the new Soviet leadership seems to be trying to create the impression that it is scaling down Soviet demands

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for a Berlin settlement by implying that recognition of the communist-defined status quo will now suffice and radical "normalization" is no longer necessary. There is no indication, however, that the new Soviet terminology means the abandonment of basic Soviet positions on access matters (on the contrary, Moscow in its November 28 note reiterated its contention that international flights to Berlin were illegal). The new formula would be consistent with Moscow's dropping its old demands for immediate or eventual withdrawal of Western troops from Berlin. But even so, the resulting Soviet position would still be designed to serve the old objective of isolating West Berlin and using the Berlin issue as a device for dividing West Germany from its allies. In any case the new language on Berlin appears intended to appeal to the allies but not to the West Germans, and thus to contribute to Western differences over manifestations of the FRG presence in Berlin. Conceivably, the Soviets may see as a later stage in their tactic the formal incorporation of East Berlin into the GDR with minimal allied reaction and consequent West German resentment.

Conclusion

The significance and potential implications of the extensive revision of the Soviet political lexicon on Berlin issues still remains to be seen. Gromyko, obviously, had little to say about it in his New York conversations.

For the present Moscow appears to wish to complete the job which Khrushchev had undertaken of developing a position suited to a prolonged period of stalemate over Berlin. Moreover, the Soviets appear to wish to develop a somewhat more forthcoming posture in order to engage the West in negotiations on European issues, if only for the tactical advantages which they can derive from such negotiations at a moment of reappraisal in the West.

Even if Moscow has none in hand now, the Soviet Union may on the basis of its new vocabulary develop some new specific proposals either for negotiations on Berlin as such or in the broader European security field, but that still remains beyond the horizon.